



**MARGARITA SULIAEVA**

# **THE MONSTERS WE CARRY**

**Opening: 30 May 2026, Belgrade**



**XR Art Space**

# INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

## The Monsters We Carry

The medieval bestiary was never just a book of animals. It was a moral atlas — a catalogue of creatures that embodied human fears, desires, and weaknesses. The griffin stood for vigilance and power. The mantichore for cruelty. The basilisk for the gaze that destroys. Each beast was a mirror held up to the person looking at it.

This exhibition begins from the same premise, but shifts the location of the monsters. They are no longer out there, in forests and oceans and the margins of maps. They are in here — in the structures we build, the conformity we accept, the violence we aestheticize, the numbness we mistake for peace. The bestiary has moved inside.

*The Monsters We Carry* is a mixed-media exhibition combining large-format painting and immersive virtual reality. The paintings work in the tradition of symbolic figuration: vivid, almost festive colour carrying unexpectedly heavy content. The brightness is deliberate — it draws you in before you understand what you are looking at. By the time you do, you are already inside the work.

The VR component adds a second layer. Through a headset in passthrough mode, the gallery remains visible — but it becomes populated with hand-drawn creatures that float in real space, hover at the edge of vision, inhabit the room alongside the canvases. The physical and the virtual occupy the same moment. The monsters are not behind glass. They are standing next to you.

Several works also carry AR layers, accessible through your phone. These are the third layer — quieter, more intimate, visible only to those who look for them.

The exhibition does not offer resolution. It offers recognition. In the moment you see something of yourself in a creature you would prefer to call monstrous — that moment of discomfort is the point.



## CURATOR'S STATEMENT

Monsters no longer dwell on the edges of maps. They have long since migrated into our everyday lives—into the language of media, visual noise, and social networks that have conditioned us to consume others' catastrophes in bite-sized, aestheticized portions. Algorithms have blended pain with advertising, memes, and an endless feed of entertainment. Gradually, we have built an armor of indifference and forgotten how to feel horror. Consuming destruction in a beautiful wrapper, we fail to notice how moral numbness is becoming the new normal.

***The Monsters We Carry*** is a mirror exhibition. It neither accuses nor consoles; instead, it attempts to break through this armor—to a place where recognition, anxiety, and a genuine, living response are still possible. It is an exhibition about the internal bestiary within each of us.

Margarita Sulyaeva catches us in this state of emotional and informational omnivorousness. Her painted canvases are deceptively festive, acting as a visual trap: rich color, decorativeness, and vibrancy initially mesmerize the gaze, holding it fast and preventing us from pulling away. Only later, through this colorful surface, does anxiety begin to emerge. Childhood fears, infantile characters, mythological creatures, digital phantoms, and imagery of violence turn out to be part of the same world—a world where horror has long since learned to look attractive.

The physical canvas here is merely the first layer. Experienced through a VR headset, the physical gallery space does not vanish; rather, it begins to transform: painted digital creatures appear alongside the artworks and viewers, remaining within the semantic field of the painting. They seem to emerge from its anxiety, from its color, from the very imagery already present on the canvas but not confined by it. The viewer perceives them instantly within the context of the exhibition—among the paintings, people, walls, and gazes. Thus, the virtual does not supplant the real, but rather makes visible what was already hidden within it.

This exhibition is a vulnerable, personal, and honest conversation about the underbelly of our comfortable lives. A mirror into which the artist and the viewer look together—offering no promise of consolation, but holding onto the hope of recognition.

**Elena Sherstyuk** *Exhibition Curator*

**VR IN Gallery** *Belgrade, 2026*



## AR INSTRUCTIONS

Three steps — and 3D objects appear right in front of you



Step 1.

Open your camera:

Point your phone camera at the QR code and follow the link — it will open in your browser.

Step 2.

Allow camera access:

On first launch, your browser will ask for permission. Tap "Allow" — AR won't work without it.

Step 3.

Point at the artwork:

Hold your phone 30–60 cm in front of the painting. After a moment, a 3D object will appear.

Step 4.

Explore:

Move around the artwork — the object stays anchored to the canvas. View it from any angle.





“Skittles”

Hybrid media art  
Acrylic on canvas,  
AR layers  
150 × 150 cm  
2023





“Telegram notifications”

Hybrid media art  
Acrylic on canvas,  
AR layers  
270 x 80 cm  
2024





"Sacrifice"

Acrylic on canvas,  
240 x 240 cm  
2023





"Tapescreen: Manticore"

Hybrid media art  
Acrylic on canvas,  
AR layers  
50 × 50 cm  
2025





“The Tapescreen: Dragon”

Acrylic on canvas,  
100 × 100 cm  
2025





“The Tapescreen: Griffin”

Acrylic on canvas,  
50 × 50 cm  
2025





“Yesterday still lives: Fruits we kept”

Acrylic, color pencils on  
canvas,  
100 × 100 cm  
2025





“Yesterday still lives:  
Shadows we grew”

Acrylic, color pencils on  
canvas,  
100 × 100 cm  
2025





“Yesterday still lives: Light we held”

Hybrid media art  
Acrylic, color pencils on  
canvas,  
AR layers  
100 × 100 cm  
2025





“Love on pink”

Acrylic on canvas,  
118 × 100 cm  
2024





"When your Batko is sleeping"

Acrylic on canvas,  
100 × 120 cm  
2024





"The lithopaedion - the cause of the war"

Oil on textile,  
180 × 180 cm  
2022





“New Perun is the god of  
thunder and war: It”

Oil on textile,  
180 × 95 cm  
2023

“New Perun is the god of  
thunder and war: Chaos”

Oil on textile,  
180 × 95 cm  
2023

“New Perun is the god of  
thunder and war: Idol”

Oil on textile,  
180 × 95 cm  
2023





“Melkaya”

Acrylic on canvas,  
80 × 40 cm  
2024



“Feda”

Acrylic on canvas,  
80 × 40 cm  
2024





“Not your business”

Hybrid media art  
Acrylic on canvas,  
AR layers  
100 × 120 cm  
2025



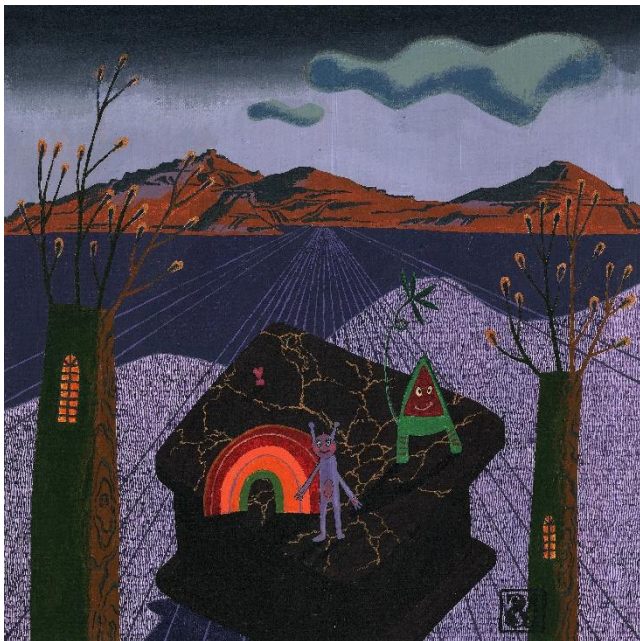


“Kinderlines: Dreamkeepers”

Hybrid media art  
Acrylic on canvas,  
AR layers  
40 × 40 cm  
2024

“Kinderlines: Nowlcturne”

Hybrid media art  
Acrylic on canvas,  
AR layers  
40 × 40 cm  
2024



“Kinderlines: Toy box redemption”

Acrylic on canvas,  
40 × 40 cm  
2024

“Kinderlines: The way home”

Acrylic on canvas,  
40 × 40 cm  
2024





“Pomegranades”

Acrylic on canvas,  
150 × 100 cm  
2023





XR fragment of the spatial scene  
"The Living Margin"  
2025





XR fragment of the spatial scene  
"The Living Margin"  
2025





XR fragment of the spatial scene  
"The Living Margin"  
2025





«The Kalemegdan Basilisk»  
Character from the XR scene  
of the exhibition *The Monsters  
We Carry*.  
Mixed reality spatial study  
2026



## BIOGRAPHY

Margarita Suliaeva (Moscow) is a visual artist and XR researcher based in Belgrade, Serbia. She works in acrylic painting, VR drawing, and augmented reality, exploring the intersection of mythological imagery and immersive technology.

She holds a Master's degree with Honours in Graphic Arts from the Moscow State Academic Art Institute named after V.I. Surikov (2021), where she was awarded the Medal of the Russian Academy of Arts. Her graduate thesis — a series of graphic works created during a field expedition to Tanzania — explored indigenous African visual heritage.

Her work has been shown in Belgrade, Yerevan, Almaty, London, and Moscow, and supported by the French Institute. She conducts workshops in VR drawing for adults and children, and is currently enrolled in the OSUN/Bard College programme *Time Machines: Clocks in History of Technology and Contemporary Art*.

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## ARTIST STATEMENT

I am a painter and XR artist. Acrylic on canvas, virtual reality, augmented reality — different surfaces, same obsession.

I am drawn to duality. Not the comfortable kind where opposites complement each other, but the kind where things develop in conflict — where something beautiful turns out to be dangerous, where something ancient suddenly feels urgent, where the imaginary and the real occupy the same space at the same time. I don't try to resolve these tensions. I try to make them visible.

Colour is central to everything I do. I use it almost excessively — saturated, almost aggressive — because I want the contradiction to be felt in the body before it reaches the mind. The brightness is not optimism. It is pressure.

Virtual reality changed how I think about drawing. In VR, a line exists in three dimensions — it has weight, direction, presence. It can stand in a room. It can follow someone down a street. This is not a technical fact for me, it is a philosophical one: the imaginary has always been real, we just lacked the tools to place it where it belongs.

I work from mythology, folklore, history — not as nostalgia, but because the oldest images carry the heaviest meanings. I am interested in what survives, what gets buried, and what refuses to stay buried.



## LIST OF WORKS

No	Title	Year	Medium	Size
1	Skittles	2023	Acrylic on canvas, AR layers	150×150 cm
2	Telegram Notifications	2024	Acrylic on canvas, AR layers	270×80 cm
3	Sacrifice	2023	Acrylic on canvas	240×240 cm
4	Tapescreen: Manticore	2025	Acrylic on canvas, AR layers	50×50 cm
5	Tapescreen: Dragon	2025	Acrylic on canvas	100×100 cm
6	Tapescreen: Griffin	2025	Acrylic on canvas	50×50 cm
7	Yesterday Still Lives: Fruits we kept	2025	Acrylic, color pencils on canvas	100×100 cm
8	Yesterday Still Lives: Shadows we grew	2025	Acrylic, color pencils on canvas	100×100 cm
9	Yesterday Still Lives: Light we held	2025	Acrylic, color pencils on canvas, AR layers	100×100 cm
10	Love on Pink	2024	Acrylic on canvas	118×100 cm
11	When your Batko is Sleeping	2024	Acrylic on canvas	100×120 cm
12	The Lithopaedion — the cause of the war	2022	Oil on textile	180×180 cm
13	New Perun — Idol	2023	Oil on textile	180×95 cm
14	New Perun — Chaos	2023	Oil on textile	180×95 cm
15	New Perun — It	2023	Oil on textile	180×95 cm
16	Melkaya	2024	Acrylic on canvas	80×40 cm
17	Feda	2024	Acrylic on canvas	80×40 cm
18	Not your Business	2025	Acrylic on canvas, AR layers	100×120 cm
19	Kinderlines: Dreamkeepers	2024	Acrylic on canvas, AR layers	40×40 cm
20	Kinderlines: Nowlcturne	2024	Acrylic on canvas, AR layers	40×40 cm
21	Kinderlines: Toy box redemption	2024	Acrylic on canvas	40×40 cm
22	Kinderlines: The way home	2024	Acrylic on canvas	40×40 cm
23	Pomegrenades	2023	Acrylic on canvas	150×100 cm



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Monsters We Carry is the inaugural exhibition of VR IN Gallery, a new XR art space in Belgrade dedicated to contemporary art, hybrid media, and immersive artistic practices.

This project was made possible thanks to the people who helped it come into being—through collaboration, dialogue, technical support, teamwork, doubts, care, and faith in the idea long before it took shape.

Special thanks to Georgy Molodtsov for his professional support, guidance, and context, which made the development of VR IN's XR direction possible.

We also extend our gratitude to the friends, artists, viewers, and participants who supported the creation of VR IN Gallery as a space for experimentation, encounter, and new artistic experiences.

We open this space together.

